United Nations A/C.2/57/9

General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 December 2002

Original: English

Fifty-seventh session
Agenda item 87
Environment and sustainable development

Letter dated 5 December 2002 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Hungary to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

At the invitation of Peter Medgyessy, Prime Minister of Hungary, an international conference on the prevention of flood hazards was held at Budapest on 30 November and 1 December 2002 with the participation of Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark (representing the Presidency of the European Union), Germany, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, as well as the European Commission. A number of international organizations were also represented at the conference. The Secretary-General of the United Nations sent a message to the conference.

At the high-level segment of the conference, the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, the Foreign Minister of Austria, the Prime Minister of the German state of Brandenburg and the heads of the participating delegations adopted a joint statement on the Budapest Initiative on Strengthening International Cooperation on Sustainable Flood Management.

I have the honour to forward herewith the text of the joint statement. I would be grateful if you could circulate the text as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 87 (Environment and sustainable development).

(*Signed*) Istvan **Posta**
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Annex to the letter dated 5 December 2002 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Hungary to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

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International Conference on the Prevention of Flood Hazards by Integrating Socio-economic and Environmental Considerations, Budapest, 30 November and 1 December 2002

Budapest Initiative on Strengthening International Cooperation on Sustainable Flood Management

Joint statement by the heads of delegations

The recent floods, in particular the floods of August 2002, resulted in casualties, made thousands of people homeless and caused a damage amounting to several thousand million euros in many countries across Europe. These severe events called for immediate responses from the political leaders. High-level representatives of the most affected European countries and key representatives of the European Commission met at Berlin in August and agreed to strengthen the future efforts to cope with such hazards.

Apparently this concern is shared by many European countries, where such emergencies, especially in relation to the major international watercourses, are well-known and studied and significant efforts have taken place to cope with these hazards. Relevant national mechanisms are in place in these countries; moreover, important multilateral and bilateral instruments have been developed in the past decades. But the recent extreme events clearly demonstrated that we should further improve our management systems, harmonize our actions and enhance our cooperation.

We are also aware that the causes and the implications of such natural disasters should be considered in a broader sustainable development framework by taking into account the interrelated environmental, social and economic dimensions, and the relevant scientific results. In this regard, we acknowledge the importance of the principles of sustainable development, precaution and prevention, partnership and solidarity.

Guided by these objectives and principles,

Bearing in mind that these disasters do not respect national borders and in order to avert them in an integrating Europe it is inevitable that the regional coherence of preventive and mitigation actions be taken into consideration,

Recognizing that only concerted actions can strengthen our abilities and opportunities to cope with these hazards,

Acknowledging the importance of international cooperation based on common responsibilities and mutual interests,

Taking into consideration the existing networks, programmes, initiatives and achievements in relevant bilateral and multilateral cooperative frameworks on these issues,

We have agreed as follows:

1. Taking into account the recent severe floods devastating large areas of Europe and the environmental conditions influencing the frequency and severity of such extreme events, international cooperation should be strengthened, in particular on flood management and combating adverse socio-economic and ecological impacts, especially in the most vulnerable regions.

2. We believe that understanding the necessity of reflecting the recent scientific and technological results and the changing requirements of the society in relation to the environment is the very first step. Also, the potential, human-induced climate change and the socio-economic conditions affecting the management of freshwater resources raise new aspects which will have to be considered when making and implementing new water management and land use policies.

3. Better understanding of the climatological, hydrological, ecological and landscape context of floods is also of utmost importance in flood management and especially in flood prevention strategies. Consequently, a new comprehensive approach is needed to flood management at the international level, implying better harmonization of the water policies and land-use practices, as well as environmental protection and nature conservation.

4. Considering all of these tendencies and requirements, it is necessary to promote changes in concepts and practices in order to improve flood management in the framework of integrated river basin management, which promotes coordinated development, management and conservation action in regard to water, land and related resources.

5. We recognize that there already exist effective regional and bilateral institutional mechanisms, including multilateral cooperation platforms, such as the international river basin commissions. Our present initiative is built on these existing frameworks and it supports the preparation of action plans for sustainable flood protection, which are currently available or under preparation in particular river basins. We strongly believe that enhanced overarching regional cooperation will be of substantial added value and will reinforce the present activities in this area for the benefit of all participating countries and organizations.

6. Cooperation in this field has substantially developed in recent decades, inter alia, in the framework of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Helsinki, 1992); the legal instruments or cooperative programmes on such watercourses and their river basins as the Danube, Elbe, Odra and Tisza; the Guidelines on Sustainable Flood Protection, developed by the Economic Commission for Europe; the Global Water Partnership; the Second World Water Forum; the joint project of Ukraine and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on flood preparedness and response in the Carpathian region; the International Hydrological Programme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the Sustainable Development Programme for the Tisza River Basin of the United Nations Development Programme and the Regional Environmental Centre; and the Tisza River Basin Forum on Flood Control. Based on these broad mechanisms and instruments,

multilateral and bilateral agreements have been elaborated, particularly dealing with water-related risk management. The process of European integration will offer improved conditions for more effective concerted actions (e.g. the European Union Water Framework Directive) and broader pan-European cooperation in the area of sustainable development in general and in dealing with specific problems of environmental protection, nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. The Plan of Implementation adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002 made evident that an integrated, multi-hazard, inclusive approach to address vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management, including prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery, is an essential element of a safer world in the twenty-first century, and called for actions at all levels, among other things, to reduce the risks of flooding in vulnerable zones.

7. Further cooperative efforts to improve preparedness, preventive policies, operational and long-term risk management and restoration measures should be planned in various areas, including the following:

(a) Assessing the factors that influence flood generation, propagation and spreading, including climate change, land use, ecology, morphology and flood plain alterations;

(b) Enhancing the development of a holistic flood management strategy as part of integrated river basin management planning, with due regard to the improvement of the security of human life and to the mitigation of damage caused by floods on the one hand, but also to benefit from the advantageous impact of floods on biodiversity on the other;

(c) Increasing mutual efforts in the development and distribution of the advanced technologies and methodologies applied in meteorological and hydrological monitoring, forecasting and warning, including international data exchange and developments in information technology to disseminate early warnings by and for the organizations concerned as well as for the public;

(d) Development and dissemination of flood risk assessment and mapping, combined with decision support tools, such as strategic environmental assessment, for cost-benefit and scenario analysis as an essential tool in the formulation of appropriate policies and measures in relevant fields (such as land use and spatial planning; development of building codes; determination of the level of services; design, appraisal and prioritization of flood alleviation projects; and preparation of effective insurance mechanisms);

(e) Fostering local, regional and international cooperation in the following fields: organizational and technological development of flood emergency measures; disaster management and civil emergency management planning, with special regard to decision support systems; methods of assessment of and compensation for flood damage; and the role of international assistance;

(f) Enhancing decentralized solutions and good practice in local damage mitigation and management with a view to improving preparedness;

(g) Raising public awareness and public participation in flood prevention and management decision-making, and supporting cooperation with all stakeholder groups;

(h) Assessing the economic tools and financial requirements to prevent and minimize the impact of floods insofar as the construction and maintenance of defence structures, the rehabilitation of natural ecosystems and compensation for damages caused by flood by establishing an effective system of insurance mechanisms to reduce the burden on individual citizens and enterprises, as well as on national economies.

8. For the sake of further identification of the most promising areas of cooperation and specific coordinated actions, we welcome the joint initiative of the European Commission and water directors on the management of flood protection and prevention, at the meeting held at Copenhagen on 21 and 22 November 2002, to document best practice on particular issues. Based on these output, decisions will be taken to organize thematic workshops on (a) long-term socio-economic and environmental tendencies and outlooks; (b) strategic planning, technical and other innovative solutions to prevent and mitigate these hazards; and (c) the relevant governance mechanisms, including institutional coherence, education, awareness-raising and public participation. Further decisions will be taken at a meeting of policy makers, to be held at the end of 2003 or early in 2004.

9. We agree to inform the various international organization and bodies of this cooperation, in particular, the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Meteorological Organization, the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Central European Disaster Prevention Forum, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, standing bodies of the relevant conventions, and regional and subregional organizations. We also underline the open character of our cooperation, thus inviting new partners to join our common endeavours.

Adopted in Budapest on 1 December 2002.